

# FOUNDERS JOURNAL

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## REFORMATION MINDSET







# The Founders Journal—

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# Developing A Reformation Mindset

*Thomas Ascol*

The Apostle Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other on his missionary itinerary. It became his Asian headquarters on his third church planting tour. For three years he labored among the Ephesians, teaching them the gospel both privately and publicly (Acts 20:20, 31). Why did Paul stay so long in this one location? Did he find in Ephesus a haven, a type of resort or respite from the normal rigors of ministry? Was his tenure there extended because the work was easier and less stressful than in other cities?

Paul answers these questions in the letter which he wrote to Corinth from Ephesus. He wanted to return to the Corinthian church and was making plans to do so as quickly as possible. “But,” he writes, “I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9). It was not easy living which kept Paul in Ephesus. Rather, it was his commitment to see the gospel established in that city that prolonged his stay there.

Paul’s assessment of his situation reveals an attitude which every contemporary pastor who is committed to the doctrines of grace needs to cultivate. This attitude might be designated a “reformation mindset” and it is especially important for the man who is facing a work of biblical reform in his church.

Reformation is never easy. Without a reformation mindset like Paul’s, it is virtually impossible for a pastor committed to this kind of ministry to stay the course; the opposition is too strong, the heartaches are too deep and, often, the progress is too slow. In short, the spiritual, doctrinal and moral problems which plague many churches today are so serious that one is tempted to judge them not worth a serious effort toward reformation. Yet, as Paul recognized, that which makes the work difficult is precisely what makes it necessary.

The two reasons that Paul cites for extending his stay in Ephesus reflect his reformation mentality. First, he was afforded a great opportunity there. Second, he was being opposed by many adversaries. By evaluating his reasoning we may uncover some

essential ingredients in developing an outlook that is bent on the work of reformation.

## Recognize the Opportunities

Paul was a preacher, an evangelist. His life's ambition was that he "might by all means save some...for the gospel's sake" (1 Cor. 9:22-23). In Ephesus he found an open door for the fulfillment of his calling. There were people there who were listening to him preach the gospel-both publicly and privately (Acts 20:20). He had gained a hearing.

Paul found that the opportunities in Ephesus were "great." This does not mean that his task was easy. Paul could not simply hang out a sign, throw open the doors and watch a church develop and grow. The opportunities were opportunities to work-to engage in diligent ministerial labor. Looking back on his time in Ephesus Paul could testify, "for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). How many pastors today can say the same thing? How many would even consider this as a legitimate pastoral responsibility?

The door of opportunity which Paul judged to be great consisted of the privilege to spend and be spent for the sake of the gospel. It was the opportunity to weep for the souls of men and women; to preach and teach the gospel; to declare to the Ephesians "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

What made Ephesus such a wonderful opportunity to Paul was not the ease of the work, not the climate, the education level of the people, nor the salary package. No, what made it so attractive to Paul was the fact that God had providentially placed him there in the midst of so many needy people. And, as a minister of Christ, he was convinced that he had the answer to their needs in the "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

The people to whom Paul had an opportunity to minister in Ephesus can be divided into at least three categories, each of which is still with us today.

### **The Partially Taught**

Upon arriving in Ephesus Paul encountered twelve disciples who had been baptized "into John's baptism" (Acts 19:1-3). Whether these individuals were actually converted or not is subject to debate. On the one hand, Luke's designation of them ("disciples," v.

1) seems to indicate that they were already believers. On the other hand, their ignorance of the Holy Spirit and Paul's instruction to them suggest that they were in need of conversion (vv. 3-4). Whatever their case (and theologically it could be either), they had received only partial teaching about Christ and His salvation. They needed to be further instructed. Like Apollos, they needed to have "the way of God more accurately explained" to them (Acts 18:26). Once Paul did this, they embraced the truth and adjusted their lives accordingly.

Rather than becoming overwhelmed or discouraged by the difficulties which these disciples presented, Paul seized it as an opportunity to teach them more thoroughly the gospel of Christ. He corrected their erroneous thinking and added to their incomplete understanding.

This type of ministry is still needed today. In every church there are sincere, earnest followers of the Lord who have been only partially or inaccurately taught. Their understanding is not as good as their experience. They need to be established in the faith. When they come to a knowledge of the truth their outlook changes; they recognize more of the amazing grace of God in bringing them to salvation.

### **The Religiously Lost**

Others that Paul encountered in Ephesus could best be described as unconverted religionists. These were the Jews, to whom (as was his custom), he took the gospel first (Acts 19:8). Like the religiously lost of every generation these individuals thought themselves safe because of their commitment to certain ceremonial duties.

They are like the older brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. They are convinced that their service and works (or positions and affiliations) merit acceptance with the Father (cf. Luke 15:29). Further, they are threatened and feel indicted by anyone who insists that salvation is wholly of God's grace.

Paul did not overlook unconverted religious people. He saw them as a great mission field. After all, he had once been just like them. Having been saved by grace himself, he was convinced that God's grace could reach them, also. Therefore he preached the gospel to them and set before them the one way of salvation.

There is evidence that some Jews were converted and became part of the church in



Ephesus. But there is also the indication that “some were hardened and did not believe.” Further, they even “spoke evil of the Way before the multitude” (Acts 19:9). The true reformer will inevitably meet with recalcitrance and criticism on the part of some. Paul did not allow this to knock him off course, and neither should we. If some refuse to believe and become critical of the direction and content of the preaching, there are others who will receive it and who will be transformed by it. For the sake of the latter we must not be overwhelmed by the former. Like Paul, we must be willing “to endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).

### **The Openly Lost**

Along with the impartially taught and the religiously unconverted, Paul had great opportunity to minister to many who made no profession of being right with God. The apostle had a deep love for those who were obviously unconverted. The presence of many Gentiles was no small part of the reason that he extended his stay in Ephesus.

Proper reformation mentality is never devoid of genuine compassion for spiritually lost people. It is not enough to straighten out ignorant believers and confront religious hypocrites. The pastor bent on reformation must also see the fields white unto harvest. He must cultivate a love for sinners that is reflective of our Lord’s own heart.

In the heat of the battle over God’s truth, while correcting mistaken notions about the gospel and exposing the fallacy of false belief, the temptation to lose sight of the harvest fields is great. The pastor and church who are committed to thorough, biblical reformation will never be satisfied with seeing a sanctifying work among believers that is not accompanied by a regenerating work among unbelievers.

The humbling yet hopeful truth about evangelism is that one sows and another waters but only God can give the increase. The work of regeneration is beyond human ability. It is the sovereign activity of God. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit”(John 3:8). Evangelism-taking the gospel to the unconverted-is our responsibility. It is the gospel that the Spirit uses to regenerate unbelievers. Therefore, in complete dependence on the Sovereign Spirit we must promiscuously spread the gospel throughout our communities and around the world.

Paul preferred to preach the gospel to those who had never heard it (Rom. 15:20-21). He did not allow himself to be distracted from the great privilege and responsibility to make disciples of all nations. Evangelism must never be set against the work of reformation. The disciples in the book of Acts never did. They confronted and corrected problems in the church without setting aside their ongoing evangelistic efforts. Genuine reformation will always include a healthy emphasis on evangelism.

## Rightly Assess the Opposition

A second key dimension in Paul's reformation mindset was the proper assessment of his opponents. It may sound strange to some that a minister of the gospel would have opponents. We are, after all, called to live blameless lives and to strive for a conscience that is "without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16; cf. 2 Cor. 6:3; Philip. 1:10). Yet, even the minister who attains this to a large degree (and no one perfectly attains it) will inevitably meet with opposition.

Though we are not to give offense, the gospel is irreparably offensive. It is still a stumbling block and a scandal to various kinds of unbelievers. Make no mistake, where the biblical gospel is preached, there will be opposition. To think otherwise reveals not only an unrealistic naivete but also lack of familiarity with the book of Acts.

Paul faced strong opposition to his ministry. He had "many adversaries." Now, it is certain that he took no delight in being opposed. There is a type of minister that seems to measure his effectiveness by the number of people who are mad at him. Paul was not like that. But neither was he like those who interpret every opposition as a failure or as a reason to pack up and leave town.

Notice what Paul says. He determined to stay in Ephesus not *in spite* of the presence of many adversaries, but *because* of them! He judged opposition to his ministry as reason to stay. We mobile moderns do not typically think this way. Pastors are often tempted to interpret opposition as divine indication that their ministry in that church is over. The man who readily yields to this temptation has not yet developed a reformation mindset and will inevitably find the work of reforming a local church an impossibility.

When we consider Paul's adversaries in Ephesus there are two types that are easily

identified.

### **Pagan Opponents**

In Ephesus the gospel challenged the prevailing false religions and related economic interests. As people were converted they, of course, abandoned their former false worship and ceased purchasing the handcrafted idols which were sold by the city silversmiths. Because the message was having an impact, anger was directed toward the messenger.

Demetrius became an outspoken opponent of Paul, rallying his fellow silversmiths against the apostle. His accusation reveals his animosity: "This Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed whom all Asia and the world worship" (Acts 19:26-27).

The hostility against Paul became so great that a riot broke out in the city. Yet, the apostle was not compelled to end his ministry in Ephesus because of this. Rather, he saw it as reason to stay. Why? Was Paul simply hardheaded? Was he belligerent? Did he take some kind of perverse pleasure in seeing people angered against him?

No. The only way to make sense of Paul's response is to understand his reformation mentality. We gain further insight into his thinking by considering his address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Speaking of the chains and tribulations that awaited him in Jerusalem, he said, "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

What matters is the cause of God and His truth in the world. If opportunity to preach the gospel continues, then contempt and hostility from the unbelieving world, even of the most hostile sort, is insufficient reason to leave.

### **Religious Opponents**

If opposition from pagans is difficult to handle, opposition from religious people is even more grievous. Paul's greatest adversaries came from the Jewish leadership. These, very often, regarded themselves as paragons of virtue. They were the guardians of

tradition and, consequently, resisted the “new” teaching of the early Christians (which in truth was a right understanding and fulfillment of the “old” teaching in the Old Testament).

Whereas the world is open and direct in its attack against the gospel and its messengers, religious opponents are always more subtle. Demetrius publicly instigated a riot against Paul. The Jews attacked him with carefully conceived plots (Acts 20:19). We have no way of knowing with certainty what those plots entailed, but the very idea suggests behind-the-scenes strategy and sinister aspirations.

Perhaps Paul had his religious opponents in mind when he warned the Ephesian elders of “savage wolves” who would come into the church and men from within their own ranks who would rise up and speak “perverse things” (Acts 20:29-30). His letters to Timothy, who was pastoring the church in Ephesus, indicate similar concern about opposition from religionists (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 4:1-5, 12; 2 Tim. 2:14-18, 23-26; 3:1-13; 4:15, etc.).

The sad fact is that from Paul’s day to our own, subtle, harmful opposition has always been mounted against the gospel by those who fancy themselves religious. And their hatred of the message manifests itself in contempt for the messenger. It is a painful and trying experience to endure. At times it can be completely deflating. But, it is no reason to stop laboring for thorough, biblical reformation in a church.

## Conclusion

In this day when churches are in such spiritual disarray and doctrinal disrepair, the call of every pastor and every serious believer is to pray for and work toward reformation. To do this requires the development of a fresh outlook, a new perspective on the challenges and opportunities before us.

Paul gives us an excellent model to emulate. He looked upon his work with a reformation mentality. This same attitude is found in the great martyrs and reformers throughout church history. It is epitomized in Martin Luther and given expression in his great Reformation hymn.



And tho' this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us...

Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill:  
God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

If we hope to see a recovery of the gospel in our day, we must embrace the attitude of this hymn. We must commit ourselves with apostolic tenacity to the task before us. Most importantly, we must commit ourselves afresh to remember Jesus Christ, “who endured such hostility against Himself, lest we become weary and discouraged in our souls” (Heb. 12:3).

[A helpful booklet, *Reforming the Local Church* by Ernest Reisinger, outlines some practical steps for pastors and church leaders. It is available through the *Founders Journal*.] *It must be a sign that reformed preachers are rendering acceptable service when they are resented and resisted by the carnal in their congregation. This is not meant as a defense of ministerial indiscretion but as an encouragement to ministerial faithfulness. A young preacher is apt to blame it all on himself when the principal men and women of a congregation are aroused against him. It may indeed be that he is partly to blame. But the greatest sin might rather be in those who rise up against him because his application of God's word is all too true. Religious sinners, when cut close to the bone, can react with incredible fury and they can spit like fire at the hand which wields the sword in the pulpit.*

—Maurice Roberts, “Acceptable Service” *Banner of Truth*, July 1989, p. 3.

# An Encouragement to Ministers in Trial

*Fred Malone*

Many enter the ministry to get something out of it, not to be accountable stewards of God's Word. Some enter to get encouragement, to feel importance, to feel useful to God, to solve problems, others enter for prestige or power. Good or bad, none of these are adequate reasons. None will last over time and trial.

There are so many possible discouragements in the Gospel ministry. It is not that one's people are so bad. For frankly they are all alike, sinners saved by grace who still sin. To think that one will ever get his people past that point, or find a church free of problems, he only needs to read Paul more closely. Nor is it that Satan is undefeatable, for he is even now in his death-throes as he lashes out at all who love Christ and preach Him.

The greatest discouragement for *this* minister, and many, is within himself. Especially when under stress of trials. For as one walks in Christ after many years, he finds with Paul that he too is the chief of sinners. He finds that if he had no sinful sheep at all, still he would have a full-time job keeping his own heart.

Therefore, I would like to encourage ministers in trial by applying the encouragements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our own hearts, for it is in the keeping of the minister's heart that the keeping of our people's hearts begins. That is why Paul told Timothy: "Take heed to yourself and to your doctrine, persevere in these things; for in so doing, you will insure your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

There are some unique discouragements which may attend the ministry of the Gospel, but there are four encouragements to Gospel ministers which have helped many in times of trial.

I. *First, you are going to endure trials and suffer to some degree.* That may not be very encouraging to you, but it is to me. Our Lord tells us at the entry way so that we will not be discouraged when it comes. Matt. 10:5-39 is our Lord's manual of evangelism. We do not see this in such manuals today. He tells disciples that He did not come to bring peace but a sword. That they will be hated by all on account of His name. That a man's

enemies will be those of his own household. That they must overcome the fear of men who kill the body by a greater fear of God who can destroy both soul and body in hell. That this Father can protect them from men. The whole fabric of the New Testament, from our Lord's teachings to 1 Peter to Revelation, explains that the Christian will suffer; especially, God's ministers.

There is something wrong with someone who enjoys suffering and martyrdom. Some may even precipitate crises because it makes them feel important and faithful and manly. This is self-centered and immature. However, 2 Tim. 2:3, 8-10, and 3:10-12, make it clear. God's faithful ministers will suffer to some degree. There will be trials. No matter how much you count the cost beforehand, there is no way you can fully understand the cost of the ministry until you experience it.

Therefore, do not be surprised by trials to some degree. This work excludes much expectation of temporal ease and comfort, so we need to accept this probability and be content in having Jesus Christ, if nothing else.

Charles Bridges (*The Christian Ministry*) list four trials of the ministry. They come from (1) the professing church, (2) the world, (3) the power of Satan, and (4) from ourselves.

A. *Consider the trials of the professing church.* Cotton Mather reported John Eliot's great trial (Bridges, *Christian Ministry*, p. 12):

He looked upon the conduct of a church as a thing attended with so many difficulties, temptations, and humiliations as that nothing but a call from the Son of God could have encouraged him unto the susception of it. He saw that flesh and blood would find it no very pleasant thing to be obliged unto the oversight of a number that by a solemn covenant should be listed among the volunteers of the Lord Jesus Christ; that it was no easy thing to feed the souls of such a people, and of the children and of the neighbors, which were to be brought into the same sheepfold with them; to bear their manners with all patience, not being by any of their infirmities discouraged from teaching of them; and from watching and praying over them; to value them highly, as the flock which God purchased with His own blood; notwithstanding all their miscarriages; and in all to examine the rule of Scripture for the warrant of whatever shall be done; and to remember the day of

judgment wherein an account must be given of all that has been done. It was herewithal his opinion (as the great Owen expresses it) that notwithstanding all the countenance that is given to any church by the public magistracy, yet whilst we are in this world, those who will faithfully discharge their duty as ministers of the Gospel shall have need to be prepared for sufferings; as it was in a sense of these things that he gave himself up to the Sacred Ministry.

Bridges response to Eliot's opinion was: "Except we realize a high estimation of the Church, the constraining influence of the Savior's love, and the upholding prop of Almighty grace, what is there to preserve us from sinking into despondency?"

The worst of Paul's sufferings for the Gospel was "the daily pressure upon me [of] concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor. 11:27-29).

Bridges' chief burden was that ministers are set for the falling and rising on many in Israel (Isa. 6:9-10; Luke 2:34): "For if it be joyous to convert, how afflicting to harden, by our ministry!—specially in the fear, that the more lively is its energy for conversion, in the same proportion is its influence for judicial condemnation." The sad burden of the ministry is that to some we are a savor of life unto life, to others of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:15-16). Who is sufficient for these things? Godly John Brown said:

Since I was ordained, I know not how often it hath been heavy to my heart to think how much this Scripture hath been fulfilled in my ministry. Frequently I have had an anxious desire to be removed by death from becoming a plague to my poor congregation. Often, however, I have tasked myself, and have considered this wish as my folly, and begged of the Lord, that, if it was not for his glory to remove me by death, he would make me successful in my work. (Bridges, p.13)

The trials of the minister are sometimes personal but more often ministerial. The wide shoulders of our Lord are soon appreciated.

B. *Second, there are difficulties with the world.* This includes not only the opposition and ridicule of the world, but also the outward courtesy of the world, which is worse. According to 1 Corinthians 1, the world normally looks upon us as fools and foolish. Yet



it is more difficult to see and to confront the smiles of the world, risking opposition. Should I make waves or not when things are running so smoothly? Yet our Lord said that his disciples are not greater than their suffering master.

*C. Third, there are difficulties resulting from the restless and subtle activity of the tempter.* He attacks the church always but especially the minister's mind and character. Calvin said that the ministry "is not an easy and indulgent exercise, but a hard and severe warfare, where Satan is exerting all his power against us, and moving every stone for our disturbance." We must not forget that Satan's first strategy was to attack the Good Shepherd in the wilderness before He went after His lost sheep. Surely his strategy is to attack and to discourage the Lord's undershepherds at their weakest points and strongest temptations. Have we not seen the fall of many? Watch and pray!

*D. But, fourth, perhaps the greatest difficulties derive their origin and power from ourselves.* The natural love of ease, the lack of self-denial, false tenderness when we flinch at declaring unpalatable truths, all interfere. We must labor when our hearts are in a cold state. Opposition may reveal a selfish, prideful, angry, unhumbled spirit which is often worse than anything our opposition does. Popularity tends to puff up and encourage vain self-confidence, while lack of popularity fosters impatience or despondency. The minister will suffer to some degree.

How can we deal with such trials? This is how. These discouragements become sources of encouragement because we are cast upon our weaknesses until faith finds help in the bosom of the Son of God. We must quit expecting people to respond properly, making them our tin gods of life and death. This is idolatry, to live and die upon our people's behavior. Paul said, "Having received mercy, we faint not." The comfort of God's mercy received is the only lasting motivation I have ever found to labor on in trial.

I am often asked by pastors: "Where can I get the strength to go on in the face of all these difficulties?" The answer is found in three great truths:

(1) Remember Jesus Christ and what He did for you. When you have given that much, you can stop. (2) You do not deserve any better, even if you are theologically correct. (3) If you have Christ, it is more than enough. Paul understood the role of suffering in the ministry in 2 Cor 4:7-12:

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.”

To know beforehand that we *will* suffer to some degree is encouraging.

**II. *The second encouragement to the ministry is this: It is worth it.*** It is worth it, not so much for successes we see, but because Luke 10:20 tells us that grace is better. After the disciples reported glowing successes in their evangelism and healing ministries, our Lord said: “Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the demons are subject to you, but that your names are recorded in heaven.” Grace received, from first to last, is our continual hope and stay. However, there are other subsidiary encouragements which make it worth it as well.

**A. *First, it is worth it because of the spiritual and permanent fruits of our ministry, even just one.*** Cotton Mather described the attitude of Archbishop Williams (Bridges, *Christian Ministry*, p. 19):

“I will remind you, says Cotton Mather, that one of the greatest personages (an Archbishop and a Lord-keeper) in the English nation (Archbishop Williams) once uttered this memorable speech: ‘I have passed through many places of honor and trust both in church and state, more than any of my order in England, for 70 years before; but were I assured, that by my preaching I had converted *but one soul unto God*, I should herein take more comfort, than in all the honors and offices that have ever been bestowed upon me.’ You are entering upon a work, that will keep you continually in the way of this incomparable satisfaction; and I hope... That the saving or enlightening or edifying, of *one soul at any time*, will be a matter of more joy unto you, than if all the wealth of Ophir should flow in upon you.”

Luke 15:10 records the Shepherd’s joy over one sinner who repents. We labor for the

one until He gives it. We count the preciousness of one soul of more value than all our comforts of life. Our Lord on earth went after the one and still does...one by one. So should we. If we live our whole life, spending and being spent for one soul, it will have been worth it. That is a great encouragement in seasons of small harvests.

*B. It is worth it because of the affectionate sympathies of a beloved people.* This is also a subordinate source of comfort and encouragement. They know we are of like passions and they pray for us. What a blessing it is to see kindness flow to you, not because of you, but because you were a simple instrument in the hands of our Great Physician. God's people, born again, are great lovers of His ministers. Not every Christian tastes of this privilege.

*C. It is worth it because of its special advantages for the cultivation of personal religion.* It is good for our soul to be given to study and things of heaven and Christ. Prayer, Scripture, meditation, teaching, all these things draw us to God instead of away from Him like so many earthly employments. We are not to give ourselves over to sterile professionalism but to Christ Himself and His Word. John Bunyan said, "I did preach what I smartingly did feel." But you have to feel it first. And God has given His ministers the high privilege of staying in the Word for others that they may reap the benefit for themselves.

*D. Finally, it is worth it because of the promises of our dear Lord.* Who can value the worth of the promise to those who would fulfill the Great Commission: "Lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the age." This is a great comfort to the Gospel minister.

It is worth it to serve a risen Christ. In spite of the difficulties and discouraging times, this great truth most times enables me to say with Thomas Scott (Bridges, *Christian Ministry*, p.23):

"With all my discouragements and sinful despondency; in my better moments, I can think of no work worth doing compared with this. Had I a thousand lives, I would willingly spend them in it: and had I as many sons, I should gladly devote them to it."

**III. *The third great encouragement to ministers is this: One day it will be over. One day***

*rest will come.* I do not mean “over” in a negative sense; at least not today. I mean “over” in the most positive sense; “rest” in its most glorious sense. Peter comforts all believers that the sufferings and difficulties of living as a Christian in this life will be over in the best sense one day:

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation...and after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will *Himself* perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you (1 Pet. 4:12-13, 5:10).”

What is the rest of the Christian? It is the truth that God *Himself* will wipe away every tear from our eyes. We shall be like Him for we shall see *Him* as He is.

There is an old hymn which has sometimes bothered me. One of the lines go: “Christ shall gird Himself and serve us with sweet manna all around.” That line bothers me. I often think of being on the edge of heaven’s great multitude gaining precious glimpses of the Lamb upon His throne. That would be enough. But for Him to step down from His throne, gird His glorious waist with a towel, and serve me again as at the last supper is just too much for me to bear. Surely, I thought, the hymn is wrong. Yet, Luke 12:37 stares me in the face:

“Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that *he will gird himself [to serve], and have them recline [at table], and will come up and wait on them.* “

I know that this is a parable. But there it is. Somehow, some way, the King of Kings will humble Himself one more time and wash our feet as He welcomes us into His heavenly home at His own marriage supper. I want to say, “No! No! That is too much grace! I cannot take It!” He simply replies, “You must, or else you can have no part of me.” When Paul said, “For I am convinced that the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed in us,” he had already tasted of His Master’s personal presence in a way we only hope for one day. But one thing we tired, weary,



sin-sick, people-burdened ministers need to remember; Paul knew what he was talking about. One day rest will come. One day it will be over. That encourages me to go on and labor amidst the sadness and darkness of a sin-ravaged world and a sin-weakened church. It will be worth it as we recline upon the soft pillow of our Master's breast and feel His warm embrace.

**IV.** *The fourth encouragement to ministers is this: a faithful ministry will always be successful and will always glorify God.* Our churches today tend to measure success in the ministry by statistics of baptisms and budget reports. And we want to see the Gospel effective in other's lives as well. But our Lord said to those with varying degrees of fruit and success: "Well done, *thou good and faithful servant*, enter now into the joy of thy Lord." Every faithful ministry is always successful in our Lord's eyes.

There are at least two ways that our ministry always successfully glorifies God. First, by the revelation of Himself to men in the Gospel. And, second in the salvation and damnation of men.

*A. First, God is glorified in the proclamation of the Gospel.* We are called to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light . . ."  
Dr. 1. 1. Packer says (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p.75):

"We glorify God *by* evangelizing, not only because evangelizing is an act of obedience, but also because in evangelism we tell the world what great things God has done for the salvation of sinners. God IS glorified when His mighty works of grace are made known. The psalmist exhorts us to shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people. For a Christian to talk to the unconverted about the Lord Jesus Christ and His saving power is in itself honouring and glorifying to God."

Brothers, is this on your mind as you preach the Gospel? Or dreams of success? To exalt the Glory of God, His Holiness, His Sovereignty, His Justice, His Mercy, in the face of Jesus Christ is success! We must never think that we have failed in a faithful ministry when sinners turn away from Christ proclaimed. For God's Glory has been declared among the nations. Faithful ministers always glorify God. That is a great encouragement.

B. *Second, God is glorified in a faithful ministry, whether sinners are saved or further condemned.* Paul put it this way:

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. *For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;* To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the work, of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God (2 Cor. 2:14-17).”

Whether men respond to or reject the Gospel, a faithful ministry is accepted by God as a sweet-smelling aroma to Him (see Matt. 11:16-30). A faithful ministry is always successful because it always glorifies God. That is a great encouragement.

C. *What are some implications to the truth that God will be glorified in a faithful ministry?*

1. It should encourage us to humility. God did not have to save any of us here to glorify Himself. He could have glorified Himself in our just condemnation. That should silence grumbling and complaining against God’s will in our lives and haughtiness toward others who are ignorant and believe not. Such a view humbles God’s ministers toward others and fuels grateful worship of our God of Grace and Glory.

2. It should encourage us to self-denial and contentment. Glorifying God is what we live for, not our own reputation and will. Is that the goal? “For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.” When we believe this we will learn how to deny ourselves in our relations to our wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. We will quit complaining about working so hard and getting so little respect. We will quit giving ourselves over to anger and bitterness. We will quit caring about our reputation and limited opportunities and unjust sufferings. Instead, we will rejoice contentedly because our names are written in heaven, fueling our self-denial for God and man. Seeking God’s Glory will stop self-pity and discontentment with our situation, as well as envy and jealousy at the gifts and opportunities of others.

There is One who suffered greatly in ministry. His reputation suffered, he was physically mistreated, he was repulsed at the shame involved. Yet with a heart of loving contentment for His Father's Glory and will, even in suffering, He bowed His self-denying heart in the garden and said, "Thy will be done." The Glory of God in our ministry brings self-denial and great contentment.

3. It should encourage us to patience with others. If opposition and rejection comes, the only difference between them and us is the kindness of God to us. God receives the glory for whatever we know of his grace. "And what do you have that you did not receive, and if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" When God's Glory is at work in your heart, you have great patience with others and great reliance on God's power to work in their hearts.

4. It should encourage us to be bold. God will be glorified one way or the other in every effort we exert to bring men to Christ, even in their rejection of what we offer to them in God's name. Paul came to Corinth in weakness and fear and in much trembling, but not with cleverness of speech to get better results. He did not resort to unbiblical gimmicks and gadgets and man-made methods. Yet he preached in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. How did this happen? Where did the boldness come from? Paul knew that "The work of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1:18)." He understood that God glorifies Himself through the foolishness of weak men preaching Christ and Him crucified, "because the foolishness of God is wiser then men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . .that no man should boast before God."

We do not have to fear our ineptitude, our weakness, our inabilities and insecurities as we bring the Gospel to men. We do not have to resort to desperate and unbiblical methods to increase our results or to quiet opposition. We can be bold in declaring "Christ and Him crucified" because God has chosen to glorify Himself even in our weakness through the foolishness of preaching to save His people from their sins.

God is glorified in a faithful ministry. That is the true goal and encouragement which must burn its way into our hearts and our minds. That is why our Lord prayed, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given me to do."

## Conclusion

There are many encouragements to ministers of the Gospel. You will suffer in trial to some degree. It will be worth it. It will be over. And God will be glorified in a faithful ministry.

In the heat of trial, keeping of the minister's heart in the Grace of God which is the greatest necessity for encouragement. For Paul said, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, *as we received mercy, we do not lose heart . . .*" It is in understanding that mercy received empowers the minister's heart to faithfulness that our Lord's words are fulfilled by ministers each day: "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments."

# AN INTERVIEW WITH

## Dr. J. I. Packer

**Question:** *Dr. Packer, you have done a great deal of writing and speaking on the subject of the need for a new reformation, a new awareness of the sovereignty and grace of God in our day. How do you assess the condition of the state of evangelicalism as it presently exists, and what do you think we can do about that condition?*

**Packer:** I see evangelical strength needing desperately to be undergirded by Reformation convictions, otherwise the numeric growth of evangelicals, which has been such a striking thing in our time, is likely never to become a real power, morally and spiritually, in the community that it ought to be. I mean by Reformation truth, a God-centered way of thinking, an appreciation of his sovereignty, an appreciation of how radical the damage of sin is to the human condition and community, and with that, an appreciation of just how radical and transforming is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in his saving grace. If you do not see deep into the problem, you do not see deep into the solution. My fear is that a lot of evangelicals today are just not seeing deep enough in both the problem and the need. But Reformation theology takes you down to the very depth of the human problem. And actually, the Reformation itself was a recovery of the tremendous contribution that the great St. Augustine made back at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. He was the man who, more than anyone else in Christendom, saw to the heart of the real problem. He saw how much damage sin had done, how completely we were oriented away from God by nature. He is the one who left us that phrase 'original sin' which he got from the text of Psalm 51:5: 'Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.' He also saw in response to our sinful condition, how great a work of transformation was needed by the grace of God in human lives. The sixteenth-century Reformers stood on Augustine's shoulders at this point. Of course, they clarified the great truth that justification by faith is the way in which the grace of God reaches us. We need, even today, a Christianity that is as deep and strong as that. And this, it seems to me, is where modern evangelicalism is lacking.

**Question:** *Would you say that there is a connection or a similarity between the man-centered theology of evangelicalism and the general humanistic spirit?*

**Packer:** Yes, although I think that it is an indirect connection. Secular humanism, you see, is very man-centered. It encourages every individual to regard his or her own personal happiness as the supreme value. And the kind of evangelical religion which does not challenge this self-centered, self-absorbed standpoint, but, rather, reinforces it by making one's religious experience the most important thing in the world, or God's gift of personal contentment, happiness, joy, good feelings, or that kind of thing, is simply echoing the tenets of this type of modern humanism. A Reformational emphasis, however, challenges this by asserting that God is the centre, not man. We must recognize that he is at the heart of things and that we exist for his glory, that is to say, we exist for him, not he for us. And it is only as we set ourselves to glorify him as the one who supremely matters that we are going to enter into the joy and fulfillment which being a Christian brings. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it so well: 'What is the chief end of men?' answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The enjoyment comes as we set ourselves to glorify God. But if our concern is with the enjoyment, then we won't be glorifying God.

**Question:** *Dr. Packer, you mentioned just a moment ago, in referring to the proliferation and growth of evangelicalism, the lack of any real significant power of the cross and the gospel. Do you believe that modern evangelicals have lost their grip on the biblical gospel?*

**Packer:** Well, in one particular respect we have got it all wrong. We are inclined to believe that God exists for us, God is waiting for us, God is there to make us happy. But in the gospel, God does not play the role of a butler. In the Gospel we are told that God, the Creator who made all things for his own praise and glory, has gone into action as mankind's redeemer. We human individuals are impotent of spiritual response, that is, response to God in any shape or form; but God first of all sends us a Savior to make atonement for our sins, and then he sends the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and make us willing to see and respond to Christ. Now, if we do not appreciate that our salvation is God's work in that absolutely radical sense, that is, God sends the Saviour, God gives us the gift of faith to respond to the Saviour, then we will not even be able to tell people what the gospel means. You see, we ought to be telling people that they are helpless, that they need Christ, and that they must ask God for new hearts and for the ability to trust Christ. In other words, you have got to tell them of their own spiritual inability right from the start. If on the other hand we forget this and go around saying

that God is just there to help you, and that you call on him whenever you need to, that he is a sort of cosmic bell-hop, well, then we are misrepresenting the gospel in an absolutely fundamental manner. Until the gospel is understood as a message that obliges us to say that we are hopeless, helpless, lost, and ruined, requiring also that God does the work of salvation from start to finish, then we are not presenting the gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament.

**Question:** *Given the current trends of the evangelical movement, what do you see for the future?*

**Packer:** I think that there is a big risk of fragmentation. Modern evangelicalism is simply too worldly, and the influence of the world is usually always a fragmenting influence. I think perhaps that evangelicalism has not yet learned the way of unity on anything except the outward trappings of united evangelistic efforts. And that in itself is only a shallow uniting factor because the gospel as understood by some doesn't correspond to the gospel as understood by others. And when it comes to all goals and objectives beyond evangelism, then I think that evangelicals are very seriously divided. There are some tightly connected with right wing politics, yet there are others, because of their emphasis on end times speculations, who really do not think that involvement in society is important at all. There are some who are only interested in the supernatural works of the Holy Spirit, such as faith healing or speaking in tongues, while others seem only interested in the implementations of psychology or self-help type programmes. So I see grave risks of fragmentation down the road. The only thing that can unite us is a bigger, broader, deeper, wider and more generally agreed upon theology. And I find that theology only in the Reformation heritage.

**Question:** *If the theology is the only thing that will unite us, do you really think unity is at all achievable? Because from our perspective, the average evangelical, indeed the average Christian, it seems, is intimidated by theology.*

**Packer** First of all, theology simply means the study of God. This is something that every Christian needs to realize. I think the way that the word has been used in the past has frightened many Christians away from it, even though they never stopped to consider what the word actually meant. People got the idea somewhere that theology is the business of the seminary professors and the clergy, but has very little to do with the

day to day living of the Christian life. It's something people seem to think you can get along without, provided that you read your Bible daily and think one or two guiding thoughts from your passage to keep you on the rails. I do not believe it is at all like that. But theology means the study of God, and if we are to love God, as we are commanded, with all our 'minds' then we need to be in the business of theology. So when I speak of theology, I am referring to the truth that God has given us all in Scripture which we all need to learn and digest. It is truth for life! Now, I am a professor of theology, but I must tell you that in all of my teaching and writing, I am trying to show that theology is supremely practical. If this could be seen, then I think people's fear of theology could melt away and they would appreciate, and benefit from, serious theological instruction. Again, if you will allow me to beat the drum once more, this is a Reformational emphasis. If you actually get around to reading the Reformers, such as Luther or Calvin, you will find that they did all their work from a pastoral standpoint, but at every point they are applying truth to the lives of people. What they were trying to do throughout their earthly lives was to build the people up in God's truth so their lives might bring glory to their Creator and Redeemer. It's as practical and down to earth, and as pastoral as that. That's what we need to get back to first, I think.



# The Lordship Controversy and The Carnal Christian

## Teaching (Part 1)

*Ernest Reisinger*

[This is the 10th in a series of articles on the Lordship controversy.]

We continue our studies in the Lordship controversy by examining another major theological difference between the Lordship and non-lordship teachings. In this study we will consider the differences of the two views concerning the “Carnal Christian” theory. This is one of the most perverted teachings in our generation. It is not only dangerous and self-deceiving but in many cases it is damning.

As a result of this erroneous teaching many who regularly occupy our church pews on Sunday morning and fill our church rolls are strangers to true conversion. They are strangers to heart religion because they have never experienced the power of a changed life. They are not new creatures and for them old things have not passed away (2 Cor. 5:17).

This “Carnal Christian” teaching was invented to accommodate all the supposed converts of modern evangelism. The non-lordship teachers had to have some explanation for the thousands and thousands of those who are products of an evangelism that leaves out Bible repentance from their evangelistic message. I am referring to those who make “decisions,” walk aisles and make professions of being Christians, but their lives have never been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they do not love what Christians love and hate what Christians hate. They act, think and live like non-Christians, but their teachers must have some explanation for their unchanged lives. Thus the unbiblical category “Carnal Christian” was invented by the non-lordship teachers.

The non-lordship teaching is a two-experience theory of the Christian life. Stage one is conversion, which they teach is making a decision to receive Christ as your personal Savior (this will keep you out of hell). Stage two is another decision, which is to make

Christ Lord. What the non-lordship teachers seem to ignore is that no human makes Christ Lord. He is Lord regardless what sinners say, think or do. He is Lord by God Almighty's decree: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This verse settles the question of who makes Christ Lord.

Between these two experiences the supposed convert may live like an unbeliever. The testimony goes something like this: "When I was 7 or 8 years old (or older perhaps), I received Christ as my personal Savior, but I did not make Him Lord until much later in life." This kind of testimony reflects an erroneous interpretation of one's experience. To avoid this serious error we must hold tenaciously to a fundamental principle, that is, we must always interpret our experiences by the Scripture and never interpret the Scripture by our experience.

This teaching of two kinds of Christians by the non-lordship advocates is just a new dress for the old error of the second blessing teaching. Any teaching that sends Christians on a quest for a kind of holiness that is obtained by some single, religious, crisis experience rather than by daily submission to the will of God is both erroneous and dangerous. The holiness that all Christians desire will not be complete in this world—O, that it could be!

In contrast, Lordship teachers teach that there are as many kinds of Christians as there are Christians, but they deny that there are two categories—spiritual and carnal. The Lordship teachers teach that all Christians are carnal in some area of their life at some time and that all Christians are spiritual or else they are not Christians at all (Rom. 8:5-15).

We must be mindful of that warning in Hebrews 13:9, "Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines." Another translation puts it like this: "So do not be swept off your course by all sorts of outlandish teaching..." Another: "So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas." Believe me, this "Carnal Christian" teaching is a strange and outlandish teaching. I have good reason to believe that this "Carnal Christian" teaching has spawned this terrible perversion of the non-lordship salvation.

Two hundred years ago the "Carnal Christian" theory would have been considered a

strange, outlandish teaching—a new idea based on erroneous interpretation of one single passage of Scripture (1 Cor. 3:1-4). We will consider the passage later.

As I take up my pen to write on this very live issue I do so with a deep feeling of sorrow and anxiety. Why? Because the teaching that I wish to expose is held by so many fine Christians and is taught by so many able and respected teachers. This fact causes me to approach the subject not only with deep concern but also with great caution. For many years I espoused and taught the carnal Christian error. The Lord had mercy on me!

While pointing out some of the errors and ignorance surrounding this carnal Christian position it must be remembered that a Christian's experience with God can be better than his understanding of divine truth; his understanding may be tainted with error and ignorance. The opposite may also be true, that is, a man's intellectual understanding may be good but his experience may be faulty. The Church of Sardis had the name that they were alive but in experience they were dead (Cf. Rev. 3:1).

My motive, purpose and prayer in these studies is to promote true holiness and usefulness among Christians.

## Popularized by the Scofield Bible


The teaching of the two categories of Christians has been popularized by the Scofield Bible, Dallas Theological Seminary and Campus Crusade for Christ.

A quote from the Scofield Bible clearly sets out exactly what the teaching is: "Paul divides men into three classes: 'Natural' i.e. the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth; 'Spiritual' i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God; 'Carnal,' 'fleshly,' i.e. the renewed man who walking 'after the flesh,' remains a babe in Christ" (*Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 1213, 1214, Cf. Rom. 8:5-15).

It is very important to observe the two main points in this Scofield note. First, the division of men into three classes; second, we are told that one of these classes of men comprises the "carnal," the "fleshly," "the babe(s) in Christ," "who walk after the flesh." To "walk" implies the *bent* of their lives; their leaning or bias is in one direction, that is,

towards carnality.

One of the most common and popular presentations of this position is available in the form of a small tract which presents the teaching like this:

After you have invited Christ to come into your life, it is possible for you to take control of the throne of your life again. The New Testament passage, 1 Cor. 2:14-3:3, identified three kinds of people: 

There will be no dispute about the first circle which represents the non-Christian. Note the position of the Ego, indicating that self is on the throne. The natural man is a self-centered man; his interests are controlled by self, the cross is outside the person. Now compare this with the second circle-the only difference is that a cross (representing Christ) appears inside the person although not on the throne. And the same little dots are in circle two that are in circle one, indicating that there has been no basic change in the nature and character. That is to say, the bent of the life of the carnal Christian is the same as that of the non-Christian. Circle two gives basically the same picture as circle one, the only difference being that the carnal Christian has made a profession of receiving Jesus, but he is not trusting God.

A brief examination of this diagram and its interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 will show that it is an accurate presentation of what we have already found in the Scofield Bible notes.

We ought not to miss three very salient and important facts about the teaching. First, we note again that it divides all men into three classes or categories. With this fact none of its proponents disagree, though they may present it differently and apply it differently. Secondly, one class or category is set out as containing the “Christian” who “walks after the flesh”. The center of his life is self, and he is the same as the unregenerate man as far as the bent of his life is concerned. Thirdly, all those who accept this view use 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 to support it.

Consequently, if it can be established that the preponderance of Scripture teaches only two classes or categories of men—regenerate and unregenerate, converted and unconverted, those in Christ and those outside of Christ—the non-lordship position will

be shown to be untenable.

Before I turn to some of the errors and dangers of the “Carnal Christian” teaching it may be wise to indicate what I am not saying. In this study of the “Carnal Christian” theory I am not overlooking the teaching of the Bible about sin in Christians, about babes in Christ, about growth in grace, about Christians who backslide grievously, and about the divine chastisement which Christians receive.

I acknowledge that there are babes in Christ. In fact there are not only babes in Christ, but there are different stages of “babyhood” in understanding divine truth and in spiritual growth.

I also recognize that there is a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal, but I must add that there are different degrees of carnality. Every Christian is carnal in some area of his life at many times in his life—“the flesh lusteth against the Spirit” (Gal. 5:17).

All the marks of Christianity are not equally apparent in all Christians. Nor are any of these marks manifest to the same degree in every period of any Christian’s life. Love, faith, obedience, and devotion will vary in the same Christian in different periods of his Christian experience; in other words, there are many degrees of sanctification.

The Christian’s progress in growth is not constant and undisturbed. There are many hills and valleys in the process of sanctification; and there are many stumblings, falls and crooked steps in the pathway to the Celestial City. There are examples in the Bible of grievous falls and carnality in the lives of true believers. Thus we have the warnings of temporal judgment and of chastisement by our heavenly Father.

These truths are all acknowledged and are not the point of this present study. The question we have to consider is: Does the Bible divide Christians into two categories? This is the issue at the heart of the “Carnal Christian” teaching.

## Errors in the Non-Lordship Teaching on the Carnal Christian

*First Error.* This “Carnal Christian” doctrine is erroneous because of a wrong interpretation and application of the single passage of Scripture on which it is based, namely, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. The historical and true interpretation will be dealt with at

length later.

The most doctrinal portion of the New Testament is the epistle to the Romans, and on this all reasonable Bible scholars and theologians would agree. Most scholars (if not all) would further agree that Paul's epistle to the Galatians is the second most doctrinal portion of the New Testament. The first epistle to the church at Corinth is primarily dealing with practical problems in the church:

Chapters 1-3 Strife and contentions about the ministers (Cf. 1:12,13; 3:3-6; 3:21,22). Chapter 5 Immorality and incest (v. 1). No repentance (v. 2). Chapter 6:1-10 Lawsuits against one another (v. 7). Defrauding and wronging one another (v. 8). Chapter 7:1-17 Sexual problems between husbands and wives. Instruction to explain that sex was for more than procreation. Chapter 8:1-13 Christian liberty. Weak and strong Christians. Fighting over meat offered to idols. Chapter 9 Paying the preachers and Paul's Apostleship. Chapter 10 Christian liberty. Chapter 11:1-16 Problems with women and their hats and hairdos. Chapter 11:17 Their public coming together did more harm than good. Chapter 11:20-23 Disorder at the Lord's Table. Chapter 12-14 Spiritual gifts, lack of love (v. 13). Chapter 15 Doctrinal error of the worst sort. Foundational doctrine of Christianity—the resurrection. Chapter 16 Problems with the collection. All of these problems are examples of carnality in Christian behavior. Therefore, the strife, division and contentions over the ministers in 1 Corinthians, chapters 1 to 3 is just one of the problems, and in this area of their lives, the Corinthians were carnal. That is, they acted like babies and just like the unregenerate in this particular area of their lives. The passage is not teaching three categories of mankind, or two classes of Christians. Such a view is foreign to the rest of the Bible.

The following two quotations are only two of many Scriptures which clearly teach that all mankind is divided into two categories and no more

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not

walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life-and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his" (Romans 8:1-9).

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of the which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in the time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:17-24).

These two passages simply set out what the rest of the Bible clearly teaches, namely, that there are only *two* classes or categories of men and within these two classes there may be many shades and degrees. To interpret 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, therefore, in such a way as to divide men into three classes is to violate the cardinal rule of interpretation. This rule requires us to interpret all single passages in the light of the whole, to interpret all subordinate passages in the light of the leading truth, or to interpret all obscure passages in the light of clear passages. This teaching is erroneous because it is an incorrect interpretation and application of the single portion of Scripture on which it is founded.

*Second Error.* The "Carnal Christian" teaching is erroneous because it contradicts and perverts the two basic blessings of the new covenant—justification and sanctification—and their relationship to each other. Justification is what Christ does **for** us in heaven. Specifically, He covers our record with His blood and gives us a legal right to enter in.

Sanctification is what Christ does **in** us by His Holy Spirit on earth-this gives us some practical fitness. (See *FJ* 15).

The working of His Spirit in us and the cleansing of His blood for us are inseparably joined in the application of His grace. Therefore, any attempt to place the act of submission subsequent to conversion is to cut the living nerve out of the New Covenant. The “Carnal Christian” teaching does just that; it separates what God has joined together and thus perverts biblical Christianity, bringing dishonor on the blood of Christ that was shed to enact the entirety of the New Covenant which includes both justification and sanctification.

The *Children’s Catechism* sums it up beautifully “What did God the Father undertake in the Covenant of grace? Answer: to justify and sanctify those for whom Christ should die.” *For* you, is your creed; *in* you is your experience.

*Third Error.* The next major error is that this teaching does not distinguish between true, saving belief and spurious belief. This distinction is found throughout the New Testament. Many believed but Jesus did not commit Himself to them (John 2:23, 24); they believed but did not confess Him (John 12:42, 43); they believed for awhile (Luke 8:13); Simon Magus believed and was baptized but he thought he could buy the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:12-32); Peter said he would perish, (v. 20); his heart was not right (v. 21); therefore not changed, he was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity (v.23). But the strongest evidence is in his prayer—he, like the unregenerate, was only concerned with the consequence of sin and made no request to be pardoned and cleansed from sin—just, “...that none of these things come upon me.” Just like the so-called carnal Christian he wanted Jesus as a kind of hell insurance policy but does not want delivered from sin. James 2:19 says, “the devils believe...”

In all of these cases people believed, that is, they had faith but it was not saving faith. Similarly all of the carnal Christians have belief, but it is not always saving belief (see *FJ* 10 & 11).

*Fourth Error.* The “Carnal Christian” teaching excludes repentance, at least by implication, in the fact that they teach that the carnal Christian has not necessarily changed in practice but lives and acts just like the natural man. This is easily seen in the



diagram where self is still on the throne. Not to teach the necessity of repentance is a very grave error, and to depart from the Apostolic example of the gospel message and its propagation (see *FJ 14*).

*Fifth Error.* The “Carnal Christian” position ignores much biblical teaching on the doctrine of assurance, namely, that Christian character and conduct have something to do with assurance. For the Lordship view of assurance see the Baptist Confession of 1689, chapter 18. I will have more on assurance in a future article.

## Questions Raised by the Carnal Christian Teaching

1. Are we sanctified passively, that is, by faith without the deeds of the law? (Note: I did not say justified but sanctified.) If sanctification is passive—a kind of “let go and let God”—then where do we place the apostolic admonitions in the New Testament such as, “I fight,” “I run,” “I keep under my body,” “let us cleanse ourselves,” “let us labour,” “let us lay aside every weight”? None of these are passive expressions nor do they express some single act as the experience of victory or some single experience as the means of becoming more spiritual and mature.

2. Does not appealing to the so-called carnal Christian to become a spiritual Christian depreciate the real conversion experience by over-appreciating the second experience by whatever name it may be called (which is variously designated higher life, deeper life, spirit filled life, triumphant living, making Christ Lord not just Savior, etc.)? “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). This passage is not talking about a second experience but rather about what happens in a real conversion experience.

Has the spiritual Christian finished growing in grace? If not, what is he to be called, as he continues to grow in grace? Do we make still more unbiblical categories, such as, “spiritual, spiritual Christian” or “super spiritual Christian”?

3. Who is to decide who the carnal Christians are and exactly what standard is to be used in determining this? Do the spiritual Christians decide who the carnal Christians are? Does a church or preacher decide where the line is to be drawn that divides the two classes or categories? Would you like the responsibility of dividing the members of your church into unsaved, carnal Christian, spiritual? Since all Christians have

remaining sin in them and since they sin every day, how much sin, or, what particular sins classify a person as a carnal Christian?

4. Do not all Christians act like natural men at times in some area of their lives?

5. Do not the inward sins, such as, envy, malice, covetousness, lasciviousness (which included immorality on the mental level) prove that a person is carnal just as much as some outward manifestation of external sins?

6. How much sin can a spiritual Christian commit and still be in the spiritual category?

7. Does the Christian go back and forth from spiritual to carnal and carnal to spiritual? How often can this changing of categories take place?

8. When and how does a carnal Christian become a spiritual Christian?

9. Are there different degrees of carnality and different degrees of sanctification in the so-called spiritual Christians?

If some of these questions seem a bit ridiculous it is because they are raised by an unbiblical, ridiculous teaching.

If all the carnal Christian teachers would seriously study the following questions and answers found in the Larger Catechism they would stop teaching the unbiblical theory of the carnal Christian category.

*Q. 75. What is sanctification?*

A. Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.

*Q. 77. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?*

A. Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one cloth equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

*Q. 78. Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers?*

A. The imperfections of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit, whereby they are often foiled with temptations and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God.

[\[Go to Part 2\]](#)

# The Servant in Battle

**O LORD,**

**I bless thee that the issue of the battle between thyself and Satan**

has never been uncertain,  
and will end in victory.

**Calvary broke the dragon's head,**

and I contend with a vanquished foe,  
who with all his subtlety and strength  
has already been overcome.

**When I feel the serpent at my heel**

may I remember him whose heel was bruised,  
but who, when bruised, broke the devil's head.

**My soul with inward joy extols the mighty conqueror.**

**Heal me of any wounds received in the great conflict;**

if I have gathered defilement,

if my faith has suffered damage,

if my hope is less than bright,

if my love is not fervent,

if some creature-comfort occupies my heart,

if my soul sinks under pressure of the fight.

**O thou whose every promise is balm,**

every touch life,

draw near to thy weary warrior,

refresh me, that I may rise again to wage the strife,

and never tire until my enemy is trodden down.

**Give me such fellowship with thee that I may defy Satan,**

unbelief, the flesh, the world,  
with delight that comes not from a creature,  
and which a creature cannot mar.

**Give me a draught of the eternal fountain**

that lieth in thy immutable, everlasting love and decree.

**Then shall my hand never weaken, my feet never stumble,**

my sword never rest, my shield never rust,  
my helmet never shatter, my breastplate never fall,  
as my strength rests in the power of thy might.

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*The Valley of Vision, A collection of Puritan prayers and devotions*, edited by Arthur Bennett (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), p. 181.

# The Dangers of Carnal Security

In the town of Mansoul there lived a man named Mr. Carnal Security. This man after all the mercy bestowed by the Prince, brought Mansoul into terrible slavery and bondage.

When Diabolus first took possession of the town of Mansoul, he brought with him a great number of Diabolonians. Among these was Mr. Self-Conceit. Diabolus, perceiving this man to be active and bold, sent him on many desperate missions. He was very successful in his assignments and pleased his lord more than most who served him. Finding Mr. Self-Conceit suitable for his purposes, Diabolus made him second in command to the great Lord Willbewill, of whom we have written so much before.

In those days Lord Willbewill was pleased with Mr. Self-Conceit and his achievements, so he gave him his daughter, Lady Fear-Nothing, as his wife. Now the son of Lady Fear-Nothing and Mr. Self-Conceit was Carnal Security. There were many of these mixed marriages in Mansoul, and it was difficult in some cases to find out who were natives and who were not. Mr. Carnal Security was related to Lord Willbewill on his mother's side, although his father was a Diabolonian by nature.

Carnal Security took after his father and mother. He was self-conceited; he feared nothing; and he was a very busy man. Any new idea, strange philosophy, or unusual entertainment in the town was instigated by him in one way or another. Yet, in the midst of any conflict, he rejected those he considered weak and always sided with the strongest faction.

When Shaddai and Emmanuel made war on Mansoul, Mr. Carnal Security was in town. He was very active among the people, encouraging them in their rebellion and hardening them in their resistance against the King's forces. When the town of Mansoul was taken over by the glorious Prince, Mr. Carnal Security saw Diabolus ousted and forced to leave the castle in great shame. He realized that the town was filled with Emmanuel's captains and weapons of war, so he cleverly wheeled about. In the same way he had served Diabolus, he now pledged his support to the Prince.

Having obtained some information about Emmanuel's plans, Mr. Carnal Security ventured into the company of the townsmen and attempted to chat with them. He knew

that the power and strength of Mansoul was great and that it would please the people if he praised their might and glory. Therefore, he exaggerated the power and strength of Mansoul's strongholds and fortifications, saying that the town was impregnable. He magnified the captains and their weapons, assuring the townsmen that the Prince would make Mansoul happy forever. When he saw that some of the people were delighted and taken with his discourse, he made it his business to walk from street to street, house to house, and man to man, convincing them of their safety. Soon they became almost as carnally secure as he was. So from talking, they went to feasting and from feasting to playing.

Mayor Understanding, Lord Willbewill, and Mr. Knowledge were also taken with the words of this flattering gentlemen. They forgot that their Prince had warned them to be careful not to be deceived by any Diabolonian trickery. He had further told them that the security of the now flourishing town did not lie so much in her present fortification as in her desire to have Emmanuel abide within her castle. The true doctrine of Emmanuel was that Mansoul should take heed not to forget his and his Father's love for them. They were also to behave themselves in a way that would keep them in his love.

It was a grievous mistake for them to become infatuated with one of the Diabolonians, especially one like Mr. Carnal Security. They should have listened to their Prince, feared him, and loved him. They should have stoned this carnal mischief-maker to death and walked in the ways of their Prince. Their peace would have been like a river if their righteousness had been like the waves of the sea.

From his residence in the castle, Emmanuel observed what was happening in the town. He realized that by the policy of Mr. Carnal Security, the hearts of the men of Mansoul had turned cold in their love for him. With great sadness he went to his Father's Secretary and said, "Oh, that my people had listened to me and that Mansoul had walked in my ways! I would have fed them with the finest of the wheat and sustained them with honey out of the rock."

Then he said in his heart, "I will return to my Father's court until the people of Mansoul consider and acknowledge their offense."

His heart was broken because they no longer visited him at his royal palace as they had

before. In fact, they did not even notice that he no longer came knocking on their doors. The Prince still prepared the love-feasts and invited them to come, but they neglected his invitations and no longer took delight in his companionship. The people of Mansoul did not seek or wait for his counsel but became confident in themselves, concluding they were now strong and invincible. They believed Mansoul was secure and beyond all reach of the enemy.

Emmanuel realized that, by the craft of Mr. Carnal Security, the town of Mansoul was no longer dependent on him and his Father. Instead, they trusted in the blessings they had received. At first, he grieved over their fallen condition; then, he attempted to make them understand that the way they were going was dangerous. The Prince sent his Lord High Secretary to forbid them to continue in their ways. But twice when he came to them, he found them at dinner in Mr. Carnal Security's house. The Secretary realized that they were not willing to listen to reason concerning their own good, so he went his way grieved in his heart. When he told the Prince about their indifference, Emmanuel was also offended and grieved. So he made plans to return to his Father's court.

During the time he remained in Mansoul before his departure, the Prince inept more to himself than he had formerly. If he came into the company of the townsmen, his conversation was not as pleasant and familiar as it had been before. When the townsmen came to visit him, as now and then they would, he was not as readily available as they had found him to be in the past. Formerly, at the sound of their feet, he would have run to meet them halfway and embrace them in his arms. Now they would knock once or twice, and he would seem not to hear them.

Emmanuel continued to behave this way, hoping the people of Mansoul would reconsider their actions and return to him. But they did not take note of his new ways toward them, and they were not touched with the memory of his former favors.

The Prince, therefore, withdrew himself—first privately from his palace, then to the gates of the town, and finally away from Mansoul. He left the town until they would acknowledge their offense and earnestly seek his face. Mr. God's-Peace also retired from his position and, for the present, no longer performed his duties in the town.

By this time, the people were so hardened in their ways and so indoctrinated by Mr.



Carnal Security that the departure of their Prince did not touch their hearts. In fact, they did not remember him after he was gone, and his absence was of no consequence to them.

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Excerpt from "*The Holy War*" by John Bunyan, edited by Valeria Richardson (Pittsburgh: Whitaker House, 1985).

# News Items

## Change of Date for Founders Breakfast in Orlando

In order to avoid conflicts with other meetings, the Founders Fellowship Breakfast during the Orlando Southern Baptist Convention has been moved from Wednesday to Tuesday morning, June 14. The breakfast will be held at the Peabody Hotel, across the street from the convention center. Drs. Tom Nettles and Timothy George will speak. Cost is \$11.50 and reservations are required. Contact Pastor Greg Elmquist, Orlando Grace Church, P. O. box 940305, Maitland, FL 32794, (407) 660-1984. Space is limited.

## Stuart Latimer Recovering

Pastor Stuart Latimer of People's Bible Church in Greenville, SC was shot after being robbed while in Trinidad on a preaching assignment. He was flown to Pittsburgh where he has undergone a series of surgeries in an attempt to repair extensive damage to his leg. Recorded updates on his condition may be heard by phoning 803/371-8301. Expressions of concern may be sent to People's Bible Church, Rt. 12-State Park Road, Greenville, SC 29609.

## Mission 150

The time for Mission 150 is drawing near. There is still need for prayerful and financial support. A special double issue of the *Founders Journal* will be mailed to every pastor in the SBC. We also hope to be able to include seminary and college professors, as well as missionaries and denominational executives. If resources are provided for all of these groups, the total mailing will approach 5060,000 pieces. Arrangements have been made to offer a free copy of the *Forgotten Spurgeon* to every respondent who subscribes to the journal. Those desiring to contribute to this effort should designate their gifts to Mission 150 in care of the *Founders Journal*. Further information may be obtained by contacting the editor.

Announcing the 12th Annual

**Southern Baptist Founders Conference**

July 26-29, 1994 · Samford University · Birmingham, Alabama

***“The Sufficiency of Scripture”***

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Mr. Lloyd Sprinkle, Pastor, Park View Baptist Church, Harrisonburg, VA

Dr. Tom Nettles, Professor of Church History, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School,  
Deerfield, IL

Mr. David Miller, President, Line Upon Line Ministries, Heber Springs, AR

Dr. Don Whitney, Pastor, Glenfield Baptist Church, Glenn Ellyn, IL

Mr. Hal Wynn, Pastor, Northside Baptist Church, North Fort Myers, FL **Register before  
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Fee: \$145.00 before June 15, 1994 or \$155.00 after June 15, 1994

(includes registration, meals, and lodging)

For more information or if you would like a brochure sent to you, please call 813-997-  
5440 or 813-772-1400 or FAX 813-772-1140

**Registration Deadline is July 15, 1994**

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**Founders Fellowship Breakfast**

June 14, 1994 at 7:30 a.m.

Peabody Hotel · Orlando, Florida During the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Florida, a full breakfast will be served on Tuesday morning, June 14, at 7:30 a.m. at the Peabody Hotel across the street from the convention center. We will hear from Dr. Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School and Dr. Tom Nettles, Professor of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. We will get an update on encouraging happenings in the SBC. **Cost for the breakfast is \$11.50 per person.**

*Reservations should be made by contacting:*

Pastor Greg Elmquist  
Orlando Grace Church  
P.O. Box 940305  
Maitland, FL 32794

(407) 660-1984

*Early reservations are encouraged*